Agriculture, Trade & Consumer Protection

Fallat, Schultz Work to Preserve the Future of Farming

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Editor's Note: This is part of a series of feature stories highlighting DATCP programs and the people who work with them

MADISON – Coreen Fallat and Lisa Schultz have some explaining to do.

That's because they work with the Farmland Preservation Program, a complex program in the Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection. Explaining to local officials and farmers how it all works is a big part of how they spend their days.

"There's generally lots of support for farmland preservation, but the details can be confusing," Fallat says. "We help people understand how the tools work, so they can better plan for agriculture in their communities."

"Whether it's local government staff or landowners, we help them understand their options and make the programs easier to navigate," Schultz adds.

The two are among seven staff members who work in Farmland Preservation at the department. The program aims to keep locally identified Wisconsin lands available for agriculture. According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture's most recent National Resources Inventory, Wisconsin lost more than 564,000 acres of farmland between 1997 and 2007. That's about the size of Sauk County.

The Farmland Preservation Program helps communities and farmers keep land in agriculture through:

- County farmland preservation plans and ordinances The department shares costs with counties to update their farmland preservation plans, and certifies those plans. Local governments may also choose to adopt farmland preservation zoning. More than 400 towns and counties have such farmland preservation zoning ordinances, which make farmers in those zones eligible for tax credits.
- Agricultural enterprise areas The department has
 designated about 340,000 acres in 17 agricultural
 enterprise areas, or AEAs. AEAs are composed
 mainly of land used for agricultural production, but also
 hydrogogy processory to support local agriculture. These



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mainly of land used for agricultural production, but also include services, processing, and other businesses necessary to support local agriculture. These areas can help keep farmland in production and encourage investment in the agricultural economy. Individuals, working with their local governments, must petition DATCP for AEA status, before AEAs are designated.

• **Farmland preservation agreements** -- Individual farmers sign voluntary agreements to keep all or part of their acreage in production, and are eligible for tax credits in return. The program requires that agreements cover land in an AEA.

The Farmland Preservation Program also includes purchase of agricultural conservation easements, or PACE. Currently, there are eight properties permanently protected by PACE, covering about 3,000 acres of farmland, and easements for seven more properties will be finalized this spring.

Fallat joined the department in 2005, working with counties on their land and water resource management plans. In 2008, she began conducting workshops and other outreach efforts on the Working Lands Initiative. This initiative ultimately led to changes in the law and new elements in the Farmland Preservation Program. She is now the AEA program manager. Previously, she worked with the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources doing water basin plans.

A Sun Prairie native, Fallat has a bachelor's degree in geography and a certificate in environmental studies from the University of Wisconsin-Madison. She also holds a master's degree in forest resources from The Pennsylvania State University, where she studied protection of natural resources through land use ordinances.

"I considered urban planning, but really, land use is what I've always been interested in," she says.

Schultz, a Plover native, joined the department in 2007, also working with land and water resource management plans before becoming involved in farmland preservation. She now manages the PACE program and works with the Wisconsin DNR on a joint agency runoff management grant program. She previously worked on watershed management issues at the DNR.

Schultz earned her bachelor's degree in zoology from UW-Madison, with a graduate certificate in geographic information systems. She also serves on the board of directors for Wisconsin Women in Government, a non-profit organization.

"I like working with landowners, and helping them preserve their farms, because it's something so personal and meaningful to them," she says.

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